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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 000791

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EAP/MLS AND S/GWI

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [KPAO](#) [KWMN](#) [BM](#)
SUBJECT: EMBASSY RANGOON'S NOMINATION FOR THE 2010
INTERNATIONAL WOMEN OF COURAGE AWARD

REF: SECSTATE 111471

Nomination and Justification

¶1. (SBU) Embassy Rangoon nominates Burmese HIV/AIDS activist Phyu Phyu Thin for the 2010 Secretary's Award for International Women of Courage. Phyu Phyu Thin demonstrates great courage and leadership and has overcome tremendous obstacles in advancing the cause of HIV/AIDS awareness and providing treatment and care to Burma's under-served HIV-positive population, which includes many women and children.

¶2. (SBU) Phyu Phyu Thin, a long-time member of the opposition National League for Democracy (NLD), has been a leader in the fight against HIV/AIDS since NLD leader Aung San Suu Kyi nominated her to take part in a United Nations training program on HIV in 2002. Since then, Phyu Phyu Thin has worked tirelessly to address HIV/AIDS in Burma, founding an organization known as "Friends of the Red Ribbon" to establish hospices for victims of the disease, conduct HIV/AIDS awareness and testing campaigns, and secure and distribute life-saving anti-retroviral treatments. Working solely with private Burmese donations, Phyu Phyu Thin serves approximately 3,000 HIV-positive patients, including orphans and growing numbers of women. She supervises nearly 60 peer educators who educate their communities how to stem the spread of the disease.

¶3. (SBU) Phyu Phyu Thin faces tremendous obstacles in her work, including scarce resources, widespread ignorance about the HIV/AIDS problem, and discrimination based on her political affiliation. There are an estimated 336,000 HIV-positive people in Burma, which is one of the poorest countries in the region. Government funding for treatment programs is inadequate and the availability of donor support for anti-retroviral treatments is insufficient to meet the need. For many years public education about HIV/AIDS was almost non-existent.

¶4. (SBU) As a member of the NLD, Phyu Phyu Thin has encountered harassment, intimidation, and even arrest at the hands of Burma's military regime. In 2000, she and several of her colleagues were arrested and held for over four months after gathering at a Rangoon train station to bid farewell to Aung San Suu Kyi, who was taking a trip to upper Burma. In 2002 and 2003, Phyu Phyu Thin launched an HIV awareness campaign in Rangoon, but was soon pressured to stop by the regime. For several months following the peaceful pro-democracy protests in September 2007, Phyu Phyu Thin was forced into hiding after the regime allegedly sought her arrest. Many of Phyu Phyu Thin's colleagues remain in detention, including Aung San Suu Kyi, who first encouraged her to take up HIV/AIDS as a cause. Furthermore, the GOB frequently questions Phyu Phyu Thin's peer educators and demands to check the paperwork of her patients.

¶5. (SBU) Phyu Phyu Thin's political affiliation with the NLD, a registered political party, precludes her from receiving funds from foreign government donors. Furthermore, some NGOs are hesitant to assist her patients for fear that assisting those connected to the NLD will result in GOB harassment. In the face of these significant obstacles, Phyu Phyu Thin has demonstrated courage, poise, and an unwavering commitment to cause of HIV/AIDS awareness and treatment. She has overcome political, economic, and social obstacles to her mission and in so doing has inspired many others to join the cause. As one of the recipients of her assistance observed during a World AIDS Day ceremony, "if not for the NLD, if not for Phyu Phyu Thin, no one would care for us, no one would do anything for us." We strongly recommend Phyu Phyu Thin for this award as an exemplary woman of courage.

¶6. (SBU) Phyu Phyu Thin is aware of and has consented to her nomination for this award.

Biographical Details

¶7. (SBU) Phyu Phyu Thin's biographical details are as follows:

- Name: Phyu Phyu Thin (note: Burmese names cannot be broken into separate parts, so her name must always be read and written as a whole);
- Job Title: HIV/AIDS activist, "Friends of the Red Ribbon" director, and National League for Democracy member;

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- Date of Birth: 23 December 1971;
- Country of Birth: Burma;
- Citizenship: Burma;
- Address: Withheld for security purposes; nominee can be contacted via Embassy Rangoon;
- Telephone: Withheld for security purposes; nominee can be contacted via Embassy Rangoon;
- E-mail: Withheld for security purposes; nominee can be contacted via Embassy Rangoon;
- Passport number: nominee does not have a passport; it is possible the GOB, for political reasons, will not issue her a passport to travel abroad;
- Language: Burmese, limited English (she understands English but has a very limited speaking ability.)

¶8. (SBU) Post POC for this award nomination is Political/Economic Chief Jennifer Harhigh; unclassified e-mail harhighja@state.gov; class e-mail harhighja@state.sgov.gov.
VAJDA